

Dentists diagnose and treat problems affecting the teeth, gums, tongue, lip and jaws. They also monitor the oral health of their patients and provide screening and preventive services. Dentists must have three to four years of education at an approved liberal arts college before being eligible for admission into a four-year dentistry program at an accredited university or college. Two to five additional years of training are required for specialty practice, such as orthodontics or oral surgery. The state currently has one school of dentistry located at the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill.

The number of dentists per population has increased slightly between 1979 and 2005 for both the U.S. and North Carolina, although the dentist to population ratios for NC are consistently about 30 percent below the U.S. ratios (Figure 51). In 2003 to 2005, the gap between the U.S. and North Carolina ratios decreased, due in part to the introduction of licensure by credential in North Carolina.

Dentists are concentrated in metropolitan counties in the state (Figure 52) and in non-PHPSA and part-PHPSA counties (Figure 53). In contrast, whole-county PHPSAs have consistently lagged behind both part and non-PHPSA counties with about half the number dentists per 10,000 people.

Four counties, including Camden, Gates, Hyde and Tyrell, had no active dentists in 2005 (Figure 54). Gates County lost its only active dentist between 2001-2005 (Figure 55), and Camden, Hyde and Tyrell haven't had an active dentist since 1989. However, between 2001-2005, 67 counties experienced an overall increase in the number of dentists per population.

Table 10: Summary Statistics for Dentists in North Carolina

Dentists per 10,000 Population		Total Active Dentists	
1979:	3.79	1979:	2,207
2001:	4.05	2001:	3,314
2005:	4.35	2005:	3,772

Number of Dentists per 10,000 Population in 2005

Metropolitan Areas:	4.93
Nonmetropolitan Areas:	3.06

For the 11 counties designated as whole county PHPSAs*: 1.62
For the 27 counties designated as part county PHPSAs*: 4.24
For the 62 counties not designated as PHPSAs*: 4.55

County Level Data

- # of counties increasing dentist supply, 2001-2005: 67
- # of counties decreasing dentist supply, 2001-2005: 30
- # of counties with no dentists in 2005: 4

*Persistent Health Professional Shortage Area